

wand slightly, his lack-luster eyes kindling with fire. He looked the way a dog does when a door, which has shut him outside, is about to open. There was a moment's silence on the man's part; then he spoke eagerly.

"Bully for you, Kid! How did you pull it off?"

Carmody tingled with the glow of his companion's undisguised interest. But that was just like old Fraser! He was always an ungrudging chap. No matter if he was down and out himself, he was ready enough to cheer the victorious ones.

"Oh, I had a little thing at Van's. Perhaps I told you—and it's sold. Come along and say what. It's on me. You need something stiff to brace you up."

Fraser did not answer; he seemed scarcely to have heard. The afternoon light, streaming in at the uncurtained window, revealed with pitiless clearness his worn, deeply lined face, from which the flush had receded, leaving it ghastly in its pallor. He sat very still. The only motion about him was in his hands, which he kept slowly opening and closing. Suddenly he stretched them out, palms uppermost. They were shaking as if he had the palsy.

"Empty!" he cried. "Empty! I'm a beggar. All day I've gone up and down among the boys trying to borrow—no, to beg—money from them. And they've turned me down everywhere; they've had nothing to give me. So I came on here. I didn't know of your windfall; I'm out of the way of news. I only thought—hoped—that somehow you'd be different from the rest."

Carmody did not speak, and the tense voice, after waiting an age-long instant, went on doggedly:

"A beggar! But my wife—oh, you know Lydia!—she's ill. She's been ill all winter; only so merry, so brave! My God! I can't think of it! And she doesn't get any better. The doctor says she must go away, that she won't be able to stand the March winds here. He wants her to go South, to be out in the warm air and sunshine, and have fruit, and cream, and eggs. Why, he might as well order me to take her to Egypt and buy her one of the pyramids for a plaything! I could do that as well as the other. I'm at my wits' end. I thought perhaps the fellows might advance me a couple of hundred—"

"Would a couple of hundred do it?"

"You bet they would! I know a little place where the prices are cheap,—the doctor says it would be just the thing. I'd take her there, and I'd make her get well—make her! For—oh, Carmody—Carmody—I can't let her go!"

Carmody kept his eyes resolutely averted. He could not bring himself to look at the shaken face and what it revealed. Almost immediately he brought his chair down on its four legs with a rasping sound.

"Come, buck up, old chap! I'll be your banker. You've happened in at the psychological moment, as they say in the story books. Here's old Van's check for three hundred and fifty. I'll indorse it, and you can get it cashed—you'll need it all." He dashed off his signature as he spoke, "Take it, my son, and bless you!"

Fraser tottered to his feet with a loud cry. "You mean it! You aren't playing with me! You—" He made an effort at self-control, and put up his hand with a gesture that was full of dignity, thrusting back the little strip of paper Carmody was urging upon him. "Stop! Are you sure you can spare this? Won't it cripple you?"

"Not a bit. Didn't I tell you my ship had come in? That's Van's list, all right; but there's another party who's interested in this small boy, one W. H. Pemberton. Ever heard of him? I've done a little thing that's caught his fancy. Oh, he knows what's what—he's got taste!"

Fraser stood staring. Then his fingers closed gently over the check as if it was some precious bit of happiness that a rude touch might shatter. A tone of color crept into his face, and suddenly, gray haired and worn as he was, he seemed the very spirit of youth.

"You've given me courage again," he said without any bluster, "and I can't even thank you. Oh, I can never thank you—but I'll pay you back some day, I swear."

"Cut that out. You can settle when it's convenient, if it isn't till the millenium. And drop all the gratitude business, please. We won't say anything more about it," Carmody paused awkwardly, then continued briskly. "It's a shame the Missus has had such a beastly winter; but don't you worry, old man, she'll pull through all right."

"That's what the doctor says," Fraser interrupted jealously. "All she needs is the warm climate, he's sure of it. I must go back to her now—I can't stay!"

He took himself off without further words, clattering in breakneck fashion through the hall and down the stairs.

CARMODY stood on the threshold smiling broadly at the noise. Presently, from far below, there came the thud of a closing door, followed by a deep silence that swept grimly up through the house, enveloping the whole place with a vague sense of loss and chill. The young fellow shivered a little as he shut himself in his room again. It had never seemed so still and

lonely before, or so utterly lacking in beauty. He looked distastefully around, noting the bareness and the petty makeshifts as if for the first time.

This glance traveled to the stack of canvases ranged against the walls, some facing out, others with their backs discreetly turned, and suddenly he knew them for what they were. Failures, all of them, futile, uncared for, unworthy! He went over to the easel and studied the picture on which he had been working during the winter. It seemed no different from its luckless companions. He had lost the knack somehow—and he could never recover it again! What inspiration was there for him in his dreary surroundings? How could he hope to recapture the miracle of spring making her



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fragrant way through the land as it had earlier flashed upon his inner vision? His dreams were at an end!

A very demon of rage took possession of him, sweeping aside his discouragement. He was filled with regret for what he had done. He had been too hasty, too lavish. There was no reason why he should have stripped himself bare for a man who had no actual claim on him. Doubts crept in everywhere. How did he know that Fraser hadn't been drawing a long bow? On his own showing the other men hadn't believed his story. And they were good fellows, all of them. They'd never let a comrade suffer. But they had given him nothing—nothing! It was as clear as day why they had held back. They'd seen through Fraser's lies and his silly theatrical acting, and they wouldn't make it easy for him to go off and loaf just because he was down on his luck, and his wife happened to have a cough! They had had the courage to say no. It was only a young fool dizzy with success who had allowed himself to be fleeced.

Smarting with bitterness, Carmody made ready for the street, and started out in pursuit of his late visitor. He had no definite plan of action; but it seemed to him that if he could prove that the money had been obtained on false representations he would be justified in demanding its return. Failing that, he'd show the trickster in his true colors and ruin his standing forever in the eyes of his brother artists!

FRASER lived at the top of a dingy old building; but Carmody, toiling up the dark, rickety stairs, felt no lessening of his resentment; the dismalness of his surroundings only served to increase his anger. He went along the upper corridor and paused at the studio.

Its door was partly open, and he did not knock, but craned forward a trifle to peer in. It was his right, he told himself, to get all the evidence possible. There was no mirth such as he had expected to hear. Instead, the place was held in a dreadful sort of stillness that gripped him strangely.

And then as he waited the silence gave way to sound. Such sound! Not laughter, but sobs—deep, long-drawn, tearing sobs, as if the very foundations of being were broken down by a flood of grief. He moved away a few paces; but something stronger than curiosity, or even his sense of personal injury, whipped him back to his post.

That part of the room visible to him was shabby and disordered; but his eyes scarcely noticed these details. What attracted and held his glance was the woman seated in a deep chair, facing him. None of the little accessories that wealth provides to soften and beautify illness were apparent about her; instead, the ugly makeshifts, the anything-will-do of the spiritless, the poor, were there in all their pitifulness. She was dressed in a torn gray wrapper with a faded shawl which had once been pink huddled across her shrunken breast, and her hair lay in a tangled mass on her shoulders. He could scarcely believe that she was the same woman he had seen in the early autumn, she was so frail and altered. Fraser, assuredly, had not been drawing on his imagination when he spoke of her. But her face—

Carmody caught his breath sharply. How white and worn and little it was, no larger than a child's—but oh the glory of it! He leaned forward like one who sees a vision. Lydia Fraser had never been a beautiful woman; but suddenly the brooding tenderness in her look filled him with awe. The wonderful glory that no loveliness of line or color could give was a revelation in itself. Her lips were parted in a faint smile, her eyes were bent on the man's head that rested on her knees. For it was Fraser who was sobbing, Fraser who had thrown himself down at his wife's feet, his arms holding her as in a vise. For a few moments she let the great sobs come unrebuked, though her whole body was shaken by the stress of his emotion. She listened—and understood. Presently she fell to stroking his hair with her small, clawlike hand, hushing him gently:

"There, Dear, you'll make yourself ill. Be quiet for my sake. That's it! Oh, my brave, brave boy! did it mean all that to you? Have you suffered so much through all these months and given no sign? But I always said it would come right—don't you remember?"

He drew a sigh of relief, and his hold grew less tense; but he did not change his position. She went on speaking in her thread of a voice with little, frequent pauses for breath.

"How dear Dick Carmody was! But you might have known he wouldn't fail you; he has such a big heart. I've always liked him. And I'm so glad about his good luck—so—so glad! Van showed me that picture of his in the autumn—the very last time I was out, you know—and he said—Van said—it was full of promise. He prophesied great things for Dick. But—oh, Boy, Boy—he can't paint a bit better than you do! I guess I know!" A spasm of coughing interrupted her. When it was over she took up her words again. "I guess I know! I've held you back shamefully. I've handicapped you. There have always been illnesses, worries, and that dreadful wolf growing at our door; but we're going to change that now. I'm going to get well, and you'll do such fine, fine things! Look up at me, my darling—look at me!"

CARMODY waited no longer. He stole noiselessly through the hall, and went swiftly down the stairs back to the world of men again, carrying with him like some precious thing the memory of what he had seen. Fairer than any miracle of the spring's coming was that miracle of love and trust and happiness that had made a heaven of the little, shabby studio.

Suddenly his pulses quickened. He had been like one blind; but now he saw. Beauty lay everywhere about him,—in the long, unlovely street through which he passed; in the faces of the toil-worn people hurrying to their homes; in the glowing west, where the promise of a bright, new day was caught in a mesh of fading rose and purple. Here at hand, close to him, in the commonplace things of life, he found the way that led to his dreams again. He laughed aloud, that jolly, confident laugh of his. He'd show them all what he could do,—Van, W. H. Pemberton, Lydia Fraser—bless her!—the whole world—oh, he'd show them yet! He went forward with a singing heart.